

the know-how guide

for Neighbourhood Forums in
Birmingham



The Know-How Guide for
Neighbourhood Forums in
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Chamberlain Forum,
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Birmingham B12 0RT

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Introduction by Cllr John Cotton



Thank you for picking up this Know How Guide for Neighbourhood Forums in Birmingham Together with the website at www.theneighbourhood.info, I hope that it will give you the information, help and support you need to set up and run a successful neighbourhood forum.

Neighbourhood forums already play an important part in the life of communities across the city. As the City Council forges ahead with plans to devolve - and involve more people in - decision making in Birmingham, they will play an ever more vital role. They also bring all the residents in a neighbourhood together, helping to build a stronger sense of community and belonging. As Cabinet Member for Social Cohesion and Equalities, that's something I'm keen to foster and support right across Birmingham.

If we're going to meet the challenge of building stronger neighbourhoods and giving everyone the chance to get involved in decisions, we need forums that are:

- Open and accountable to residents
- Inclusive in their approach and practice
- Effective at organising
- Sustainable.

This Know How Guide and the Neighbourhood info website should help. But I know that real success in this depends on people – and, in particular, the thousands of local residents who give up their time, commitment and energy to run and participate in forums. You are the experts. Thank you for all that you do for your neighbourhood, your community and our city.

John

What is a Neighbourhood Forum?

Birmingham's neighbourhood forums are resident-led community groups which:

- Enable residents to come together through meetings (and online) to discuss local issues, share information and meet with elected representatives and officers responsible for delivering local public services.
- Elect a committee of usually between 5 and 14 people to represent residents' views and work with other public, private and voluntary sector bodies and other local community groups for the improvement of the area.

Forums can do all sorts of other things – including: involvement in local planning; campaigning for improvements in local services; working with the police and others to improve local community safety; organising festivals; running the local farmers' market; or getting involved in local grant giving. Forums are resident-led: what they do depends on what residents want to see happen.

Each forum covers between 500 and 8000 households (that is between about 1200 and 20,000 residents). Birmingham City Council – which pays a small grant to recognised neighbourhood forums - only recognises one neighbourhood forum covering each area. To be recognised by BCC for funding and the criteria used for funding, see pages 23-25 on Applying for Neighbourhood Forum Support Grant.

TOP TIP: See www.theneighbourhood.info for information about what other forums are doing; useful contacts and addresses; and for links to information about local planning and policing etc.

Your Forum's Constitution

A constitution is the written document that says what your Forum is; what it exists to do; and the rules that its members agree to abide by. New forums need to agree a constitution. Existing forums should check that they are properly constituted and that their constitution is up to date.

Neighbourhood forums **must** be constituted. You need to have a set of rules that is agreed by the members and which can be used:

- by members, to hold the committee to account
- to settle disputes.

You also need a written constitution, for example, to:

- apply for a grant from Birmingham City Council, or any other funder
- open a bank account.

A standard template for a neighbourhood forum constitution is available online at www.theneighbourhood.info or from Neighbourhood Forum Link Officers (usually the District Ward Support Officer) based at the Council's District Office. You can use the standard template, use your existing constitution or write your own constitution. You should make sure, however, that your Forum's constitution includes the basic information covered on the next page.

TOP TIP: Make sure that new and existing members of your Forum can get hold of a copy of the constitution when they need it – put an up-to-date copy on your Forum website. (If your Forum doesn't have a website, you can get help to set one up at www.theneighbourhood.info)

What a Constitution Covers

You can find detailed guidance on drawing up a neighbourhood forum constitution at www.theneighbourhood.info Here are some of the things you will need to include:

The Name of the Forum and Area Covered –forum areas are shown on the website and you can get help from your Council District Office if you need maps of your area.

Aim and Objectives – the aim should be based on enabling residents to discuss local issues, representing residents’ views and working for the improvement of the area.

Powers and Values – these sections of the constitution set out what kind of things the Forum will do in practice and how it, and its members, are expected to behave.

Membership – should be open to local residents over the age of 16 to join as full (voting) members. You can enable young people and people from outside the area to join as associate members. You should set out how membership may be suspended (eg, if a member brings the forum into disrepute).

Meetings – set out the arrangements for the Annual General Meeting (AGM) – which is where members elect a committee - and for ordinary members’ meetings.

Committee & Officers – Between meetings most of the business of a neighbourhood forum is done by its committee. You will need to set out the rules for: elections; committee meetings (quorum and timing etc); the officers (chair, secretary and treasurer etc.) and their powers and responsibilities.

Finance – see the section on Forum Finances on the next page for more details.

Alterations and Dissolution – specify how the constitution can be amended, how the forum may be wound up and what happens to any assets if it is.

TOP TIP – the ‘Nolan principles’ are values that have been set out to ensure against corruption in public life. They form a set of guidelines for a forum and its committee to use in conducting its business. The Nolan principles are listed and explained on www.theneighbourhood.info

Forum Finances

Forums need money to organise meetings, pay expenses and for any special events or projects they support. The way money is managed, however, can be the main cause of dispute within a forum. A few finance rules will help ensure that you make the most of the money you have and that the forum is not only 'above board', but can also show that it is. Starting with basics, your constitution should specify:

- the forum's financial year (eg from April one year to March the next);
- the responsibility of the Treasurer to keep accounts of income and spending;
- that any money the forum has will be used in furtherance of the aims and objectives.

Finance Rules

On the www.theneighbourhood.info site, you can find a set of recommended finance rules. Some key things to think about are:

Publication and Examination of Accounts - you should set out arrangements for the publication of forum accounts (eg on your website) and that the annual accounts will be independently examined by a third party who is not a member of the committee.

Bank Account – a number of banks offer accounts designed for small societies – you can find links to them on the website. To open a bank account you usually need a copy of your constitution and the minutes of a meeting at which the resolution to open a bank account was agreed.

Cheques and Expenses – make sure that cheques need two (of three or more) signatories. Have a form for claiming expenses which is, preferably, signed by someone who is not a cheque signatory. All expenses claims should be receipted.

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Book-keeping – the Treasurer needs to have a book or online spreadsheet to record payments and receipts. There is a template spreadsheet on the website. If you use a spreadsheet, make sure it is backed up. Regularly check your bank statement against the books.

Insurance – the committee should take a careful look at what the forum does and what it might become liable for. In particular, you should look into the need for Public Liability Insurance which – for a community group – can cost about £60 a year. You'll find information and links to help at www.theneighbourhood.info

TOP TIP - It is better to specify that your accounts will be 'independently examined' rather than 'audited'. Audit can be a costly process which may be disproportionate to the level of scrutiny neighbourhood forum finances need. 'Independent examination' is explained on the website.

Keeping in Touch

Many organisations want to 'involve the community' as a way of helping to achieve their aims. For neighbourhood forums, however, helping people to be involved *is* the main aim. It's not always an easy task. A forum that fails to get people involved could have an active committee, healthy finances and all the boxes ticked as far as the rest of this guide goes... and still not be achieving what it was set up to do. The key questions are:

- How do you keep in touch with residents and others in your area?
- How can residents and others with an interest in the area get in touch with you?

Public meetings are part of the answer. All forums organise at least 4 public meetings each year at least one of which is an AGM at which members can elect the committee. Public meetings, however, are not always well attended - especially when there is no urgent and immediate issue of concern for most

residents. Meetings are not the only way of keeping in touch. You might also want to think about:

- Public contact information – make sure there is a name and phone number or email address, or both, which people can use to get in touch with the forum. The details should be publicly available on flyers, noticeboards and the website and available for other people to pass on.
- Noticeboards – in community centres, clubs, shops and places of worship etc. can be used to advertise the forum and give contact information and for details of the next public meeting.
- Newsletters – some forums produce a newsletter which is delivered around the area. The cost of producing and delivering a newsletter (in terms of money and volunteer time) should, however, be balanced against the benefits. In some areas, most people ignore unsolicited written material put through their letter box.
- Stalls, surgeries and drop in sessions – some forums organise regular stalls staffed by committee members in the local high street. Others have organised advice surgeries (sometimes working with the Council, a housing association or the local police) or sessions at a local venue where people can ‘drop in’ for a cup of tea and a chat about local issues.
- Website – a large and steadily increasing number of people use the internet to find out about what’s local. Your forum might already have a website, Facebook page or space on someone else’s site. All forums can set up a free site via www.theneighbourhood.info and get help to use it effectively.

TOP TIP – the website explains how to sign up for a Twitter account. Twitter can be a good way of keeping in touch with local people and other forums and of letting them know what you’re doing.

Know Your Neighbourhood

As well as keeping in touch with residents, neighbourhood forums help people to make links with public services, businesses and other voluntary and community groups. Forums sometimes rely on one or two people who know a lot about the area. That's OK, until those people move away or stop being involved with the forum... In any case, relying on personal contacts may mean the forum doesn't have a rounded picture of what's going on locally and who to talk to about it.

How well do you know your neighbourhood? And how does your forum keep, and update, information about the area and the people who help to shape it? The kind of people it's useful to know include:

- residents' associations, including associations in sheltered housing; local faith groups, clubs and societies of all sorts; voluntary organisations, social enterprises and community centres
- your Council District Office, the Police and the local community fire station
- housing - housing officers and repairs contractors, local housing associations, council officers who regulate houses in multiple occupation. In some neighbourhoods, private landlords and lettings agencies.
- waste management services, environmental health, highways engineers and local planning officers
- schools and colleges – headteachers and principals, chairs of governing bodies, secretaries, citizenship teachers and Parent Teacher Associations
- health centres, GP practices and children's centres
- leisure facilities, libraries, sports clubs and cultural associations
- local tradespeople, traders' groups and local businesses and landowners including organisations like Railtrack and British Waterways.

TOP TIP: on the Neighbourhood Website at www.theneighbourhood.info you will find a Know Your Neighbourhood checklist, tips on making links with other people and organisations and links to online sources of data about your neighbourhood.

Local Democracy

Neighbourhood forums play an important part in local democracy. They work alongside local councillors but forums are not alternatives, or replacements, for councillors:

- Councillors – are elected at local elections at which everyone who is registered, can vote. They are nearly always a member of a political party – although independent candidates can also stand for election. Their job is to represent the people of the ward in decisions made by the City Council. They are the most important part of *representative* local democracy.
- Neighbourhood forums – are participative: everyone who wants to get involved, should be able to. Forum members may, or may not, be members of political parties, but forums are non-party political. Their job is to help everyone to get involved in decisions about the area (not just about Council services). Forums are a key part of *participative* local democracy.

Understanding their differences can help councillors and forums to work together effectively:

- Local councillors represent about 25,000 people. The average neighbourhood forum covers about 5,000 residents. Forums have even more of a neighbourhood focus than councillors.
- There are three councillors for each area in Birmingham, but only one neighbourhood forum in each area. Forums should be open to people with different views about local issues.
- Councillors are elected, forums depend on getting (and keeping) people involved. Forum committees can make decisions by voting, but they often make decisions by ‘consensus’. That is, making sure everyone is OK with a decision before it is agreed.

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Forums should invite all three local councillors (more if you cover more than one ward) to forum public meetings along with Council officers and other people who are responsible for local services and decisions. Councillors and officers – like anyone else - should be treated with respect, but they are not ‘in charge’ of forum meetings: the chair is. You can invite councillors and officers to forum committee meetings if you want or provide them with notes of your committee meetings. A list of councillors and the wards they represent is available via www.theneighbourhood.info

TOP TIP: Some neighbourhood forums organise hustings (election meetings) so that residents can meet, and question, the candidates standing to become a local councillor. There are some rules to follow when organising such a meeting. Guidance on organising an election hustings is available online at www.theneighbourhood.info

Minding the Membership

Neighbourhood forums do not belong to the City Council, to local councillors, to the committees they elect or to anyone else... *except their members*. It is important for forums to keep a list of members. In the past, many forums have said that ‘everybody over 16 who lives in our area is a member’. This, however, creates some practical difficulties:

- If the quorum at public meetings is expressed in terms of a proportion of total members, it could make most forum public meetings inquorate.
- Legally, someone cannot be made a member of an association against their will. If some people in the area do not want to be members of the forum, it is their right not to be.
- Keeping personal information (like names and addresses) of people who have not agreed to be members could lead a forum to become liable under Data Protection laws.

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- There is no reliable public list of who lives in an area (people can opt for their names to be removed from the public version of the electoral roll). Forums should keep their own list of who has signed up to be a member.

The last point, above, is of particular relevance to ensuring equal opportunities. A forum cannot apply an equal opportunities policy relating to membership and participation in meetings if it does not know who its members are.

Building up a list of members can be done by:

- Setting eligibility for full membership – in general, ‘anybody over 16 that lives in the area is *eligible* to become a member’ of their neighbourhood forum.
- Agreeing any classes of associate membership – in general, this is available to anyone over 16 living outside the area but with an interest in it. Forums may also want to consider extending associate membership to people younger than 16 who live in the area.
- Including a tick box for membership on ‘signing in’ sheets at public meetings and by including a membership sign up form on the forum’s website and on printed materials.
- Appointing a committee member to act as membership secretary with responsibility for keeping an up-to-date list of members.

TOP TIP: [Specimen membership forms, a template for a public meeting signing in form and a spreadsheet you can use as a membership list are available on \[www.theneighbourhood.info\]\(http://www.theneighbourhood.info\)](#)

Make the Most of Meetings

Most of what neighbourhood forums achieve depends on meetings. As well as organising public meetings, forum committees meet regularly throughout the year. A lot of time and effort goes into organising and attending meetings: it makes sense to make the most of them. Online at www.theneighbourhood.info you will find:

- ideas for making meetings more useful and interesting
- the usual 'running order' for a forum agenda
- templates for agendas and minutes for public meetings and committee meetings
- ideas for flyers and posters advertising forum meetings.

Here are some points to think about when organising a public meeting:

Arranging a meeting – you need to set a date and time of day at a venue that suits members and anyone else you want to invite to take part. Your constitution will tell you the notice period you need to give members of a meeting. You can give members notice of a meeting by email, phoning, posting a notice on the website, putting up posters or by circulating flyers or a newsletter. In your notice, you should highlight the subjects that will be discussed – this will form the meeting agenda.

Participants – who do you want to be there? Forum public meetings are open to everyone: members, associates and anyone with an interest in the area. You should invite your local councillors and anyone you want to speak on a particular subject on the agenda or who you think would be particularly interested or useful to have in attendance given the subjects on the agenda. (Note: you can invite other people to attend committee meetings as well – as long as the committee agrees. Forum committee meetings are usually open to members to attend).

Chairing – councillors, senior police and council officers and the local MP might come to forum meetings. They aren't in charge of it. The chair is. The chair for public meetings is usually - but does not have to be - the person the committee elects to chair their meetings.

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The chair should not be the same person who is taking meeting notes. They should preferably not be one of the main speakers. See the next page on Meeting Notes and notes on officers on page 17 for more about the chair's role.

TOP TIP: Meetings don't have to be one person talking at a time from a table at the front of the hall. You can set the room up however you think will work best: in a semi circle, in rows or at seats around small tables. Splitting into small groups can give more people the chance to speak and is best if you want to get discussion going. Sitting in a semi circle – if you have space – places everyone on a more even footing and makes it more likely that people will actively take part in the discussion.

Minutes and Matters Arising

Neighbourhood forums should keep a record of decisions taken at public meetings and committee meetings. You do not need to keep a word-for-word record.

Meeting notes need only include:

- the date and venue of the meeting
- a list of who was present, who sent apologies (for committee meetings) and who chaired the meeting (see the template for recording attendance at www.theneighbourhood.info)
- a brief description of the discussion under the headings of the main subjects on the agenda, details of what decisions were made and who was asked to take action as a result.

Once the notes of a meeting have been drawn up and circulated, they are 'draft minutes'. Draft minutes are *not* the accepted record of what happened at a meeting. Apart from being circulated to members for approval, they should not be published and when they are circulated the word 'DRAFT' should appear prominently on each page.

Draft minutes become the accepted account of a meeting when they are approved by:

- the members, in the case of a public meeting
- the committee members, in the case of a committee meeting.

Once they are approved by the relevant group, they can be called the minutes of the meeting and published and circulated publicly as such. Note: given that the period between public meetings may be several months, the committee could take the step of approving the draft minutes of a public meeting. They would remain draft minutes (because they have not been approved by members as a whole), but could be published as 'draft minutes which have been approved by the committee'.

Once the minutes of a meeting have been agreed, the next task of the group is to take reports on 'matters arising' from those minutes. This is, in effect, a progress update on the actions listed in the minutes by the people listed as responsible for them. The chair can alternatively decide to deal with any matters arising under another item on the agenda which is relevant to the action in question.

TOP TIP – the person who takes notes at a meeting need not be the Secretary elected by committee members but can be anyone, including a non-member, who the committee agrees should do the job.

Valuing Volunteers - Committees and Officers

Neighbourhood forums depend on volunteers: as members, as leaflet-deliverers, as committee members and meeting organisers, campaigners and as officers. Most forum committees elect at least three officers - Chair, Secretary and Treasurer. Some also have positions for Vice Chair, Publicity Officer, Planning Contact or Community First Reps. Some separate out the functions of membership secretary and minutes secretary. A few forums have a network of street reps who take responsibility for keeping in touch with people in their part of the area.

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Not all officers have to be part of the committee chosen at the AGM. Ones that are include the key posts that are set out in the constitution:

- Chair – responsible for chairing meetings of the committee and for making urgent decisions between meetings of the committee. Note: many committees can also ‘meet’ electronically – that is using email. In which case the chair can consult over urgent decisions between face-to-face meetings.
- Secretary – responsible, with the chair, for organising committee meetings, making sure meeting notes and membership lists are kept and represents the committee between meetings in dealings with members and outside bodies.
- Treasurer – responsible for keeping the books, managing the bank account and providing financial reports. The Treasurer is also usually one of the cheque signatories.

The Secretary also (usually) organises public meetings which are (usually) chaired by the Chair, but these jobs can be delegated to other members. In some forums, the committee delegates some of the tasks of the Secretary to other people, eg to a minutes secretary and a membership secretary. Committees may appoint particular members to be responsible for linking with local councillors, with other neighbourhood forums or with particular groups within the area. As well as the functions described above, forum officers and committee members are sometimes called on to represent the forum at events and in other advisory and decision making bodies set up by the Council or other bodies. All of which represents many hours of volunteer time – don’t forget to thank officers, committee members and anyone else who has put in time to the forum at the AGM!

TOP TIP – timebanking is a way of recognising volunteer time and making more of it. A few neighbourhood forums and residents’ groups in Birmingham are looking into developing neighbourhood timebanks. If you would like to find out more, keep in touch with the Good Practice section on www.theneighbourhood.info

Legal Matters

Concerns about legal issues shouldn't stop anyone from getting involved in, or setting up, a neighbourhood forum. Having said that, there are some areas of the law about which committee members, in particular, should be aware:

- **Data Protection** – The law protects people from organisations from mis-using personal information about them. In general, non-profit groups that simply store the data about their members that they need to keep in touch with them do not need to register with the Information Commissioner (ICO). But, you should still follow the principles of good data management which are set out on www.theneighbourhood.info
- **Safeguarding** - anyone who has responsibility for children and young people or for vulnerable adults has a duty to protect their welfare. It is unlikely that forums will take on formal responsibility for caring for people in their normal day-to-day work, but you should take care to ensure the welfare of young people and vulnerable adults at meetings and on the way to and from meetings. It is a good idea to adopt a Safeguarding Policy. If you wish to apply for a Neighbourhood Forum Support Grant, it will be needed - see the website for help.
- **Health and Safety** – you need to take care over the health and safety of participants in forum meetings and activities. Before you hold a meeting, someone should check on any health and safety issues – fire exits, slippery floors and trailing wires etc. and take any action needed to deal with them. There are additional health and safety issues to think about if you are running events and projects aside from meetings.
- **Defamation** - Forums need to be careful that, in reporting what people say (at meetings) or write (on online forums), they do not make any false statements which damage someone. The Chair (at a meeting) or

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Moderator (of an online forum) has a responsibility to warn participants against making defamatory remarks and to qualify, or delete, any defamatory remarks that are made.

Running an online forum is likely to involve further issues in relation to data protection, safeguarding and defamation. Guidance on running an online forum is available on www.theneighbourhood.info

TOP TIP: an event checklist is included in the notes on 'organising a meeting' at the Neighbourhood website. It lists things to check before a meeting goes ahead including health and safety and safeguarding issues. You can also find a specimen safeguarding policy on the site.

Effective Equality

Forums are committed to equal opportunities, but that doesn't just mean providing the same service for everyone. You need to take into account the special needs different members of the community might have and think about reasonable arrangements you can make so that everyone can take part as fully as possible in the work of the forum. Equal opportunities is not about 'political correctness', it is about doing the job effectively:

- How likely is it that the best people to be on a committee representing a neighbourhood will all be of the same: gender, or age; faith or ethnicity; employment status or sexuality? If your committee, or your membership, or the people that talk at public meetings are heavily skewed towards one sort of person, then you need to take action to get a better balance. Otherwise, you aren't doing justice to your neighbourhood or your role as a forum.
- Taking action that everyone understands and supports usually starts with agreeing a policy. Forums should have an equal opportunities policy

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setting out: the kinds of people they serve; what they will do to help ensure that everyone can use the forum equally; how they will monitor equal opportunities.

- You need ways of recording who gets involved in the forum (by attending, or speaking at, public meetings or serving on the committee etc.) That doesn't mean you need everyone to fill in a monitoring form giving personal details, like age, ethnicity and whether they are disabled. You could, for example (with permission from participants) take a photograph at each public meeting showing who attended, publish these on your website and, at each AGM, review the pictures whilst you discuss equal opportunities.
- Equal opportunities is not about getting 'token' individuals onto the committee to 'represent' women, or young people or 'the disabled' etc. You should think more widely about what may be stopping certain groups of people from getting involved. There is some guidance on things you can do on www.theneighbourhood.info

You will need an Equal Opportunities Policy if you wish to apply to the Neighbourhood Forum Support Fund.

TOP TIP: If you are concerned that your forum isn't providing equal opportunities to get involved, then perhaps someone from another forum committee could come and give you an 'outsider's view'. They could make suggestions about things you could do to get a better balance of people involved. www.neighbourhood.info has an online area which forums can use to discuss issues like this and to ask for peer support from each other.

Localism, Localisation and Devolution

Neighbourhood forums play an important part in making localisation and devolution work in practice in Birmingham's neighbourhoods. They are one of the key ways in which residents can become involved in:

- decisions about local services which will increasingly be made by Birmingham City Council's District Committees
- the delivery of Council services.

Birmingham's ten Districts each cover about 100,000 people: the size of a large town or small city in their own right. Neighbourhood forums, which cover about 5,000 people, should be an accessible way for citizens to become involved. As well as directly supporting forums, District Committees and Offices will organise activities in which forums are likely to want to be involved, including: the annual District convention; producing District plans; and the consideration of the transfer of assets (land and buildings) to voluntary groups.

Forums are also likely to be interested in the community powers set out in the Localism Act, 2011:

- Community right to challenge – which gives forums and other groups a way of challenging the way particular services are delivered in the locality
- Community right to bid and the register of assets of social value – which gives forums and others the chance to register local land and buildings (not just belonging to the Council) as having social value. Community groups will have a six month 'window of opportunity' to bid to buy land and buildings listed on the register when their owners decide to sell them.
- Neighbourhood planning and the community right to build – bodies which Parliament has defined as 'neighbourhood forums' will have powers to prepare a local land use plan for the area.

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Note: Forums in Birmingham do not qualify as ‘neighbourhood forums’ as defined in the Localism Act which says that they should consist of representatives of residents, businesses and public services. Birmingham’s forums, however, working together with local councillors and a local traders’ association etc. could set up the kind of ‘neighbourhood forums’ the law allows to exercise local planning powers.

TOP TIP: Most wards in Birmingham qualify for Community First funding – this is a small grant fund which can be used to match volunteer time and local fundraising to pay for projects which benefit the community. Neighbourhood forums can play an important role in helping to manage this fund by helping run the local Community First Panel. More details on Community First including a map showing which parts of the city are eligible is on www.theneighbourhood.info

Projects and Campaigns

Neighbourhood forums have a shared aim of bringing the local community together. They can also get involved in other things that benefit the local area. These include:

- Campaigning on local planning issues; traffic, transport and parking; the upkeep of public spaces; retaining public services and amenities etc.
- Helping to run a local festival, carnival or organising other social events
- Playing a part in committees and boards set up by the police or a housing association etc designed to improve the quality of local life
- Working alongside traders’ bodies and other interest groups to promote the area as a good place to live and do business
- Setting up and helping to manage a local community development trust or a social enterprise that aims to create local jobs and improve services
- Organising litter picks and helping to run street champion schemes or local neighbourhood wardens.

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There is no problem with forums becoming involved in projects and campaigns – as long as what they do fits with their agreed constitution. Forums should, however, make sure that being involved in other activities does not stop them carrying out their core task – creating an open forum for local people. So, for example, if forums get involved in campaigning they should bear in mind that not everyone in the community may support the campaign. Forums need to continue to provide space and opportunity for people who disagree, to meet and express their views.

If your forum does get involved in projects and campaigns, you may find you need different skills and there will be other legal and financial issues to think about. For example: public liability insurance; fundraising, publicity and project management. You will need advice and guidance about these things that is beyond the remit of this guide. The website www.theneighbourhood.info gives some links to sources of more general guidance to voluntary and community groups which you could use as a starting point to finding out the things you may need to consider.

TOP TIP – the www.theneighbourhood.info website has space for news and information from forums about projects and campaigns that have helped organise or would like help with.

Applying for Neighbourhood Forum Support Grant

The Neighbourhood Forum Support Fund is established to assist neighbourhood forums across Birmingham Districts with their running costs. Local neighbourhood forums can be supported by means of a small annual administrative Grant worth £500-£1,500 per forum depending on the number of households in the area covered by the forum. Please see grants allocation and calculation table online at www.theneighbourhood.info

Neighbourhood Forum Support Fund will only be awarded to neighbourhood forums who can demonstrate that they have met the funding requirement as well as completion of the grant application form which will undergo an internal appraisal and approval process by BCC.

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Before applying for Neighbourhood Forum Support Fund you should ensure that you have a copy of the application and read through the guidance notes at the end of the form so you can ensure that you are providing the information required. The application form and guidelines are available online at www.theneighbourhood.info To find out more about the Neighbourhood Forum Support Fund you should seek guidance from your Neighbourhood Forum Link Officer (usually the District Ward Support Officer) based at the Council's District Office (the contact list is available on the website).

Criteria for Neighbourhood Forum Support Grant

Your forum should have clear and agreed geographical boundaries, which must be located in Birmingham and should take in no less than 500 households and no more than 8000 households.

Only one grant can be claimed per Neighbourhood Forum accounting year.

Any household can only be represented by one neighbourhood forum - there cannot be two neighbourhood forums covering the same area.

Only residents living within the neighbourhood forum area can be full members of the Neighbourhood Forum.

To qualify for grant aid Forums will need to:

1. Complete and return the Neighbourhood Forum's Grant application form and along with the application form provide the following documents:
 - copy of the forum's governing document – your Constitution
 - copy of the forum's Equal Opportunities Policy (see the website for an example)
 - copy of the forum's Safeguarding Policy (see the website for an example)
 - copy of the forum's independently examined accounts which must show the start and end date of the forum's accounting period
 - copy of the forum's most recent bank statement.

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2. Provide evidence demonstrating that 4 public meetings have been held (annually) one of which should be an AGM that is quorate. Evidence of the forum's AGM in the form of approved minutes and signing sheets should be submitted along with the application form.
3. Ensure that evidence detailing how any Neighbourhood Forum Grant paid by the City Council in the previous year has been spent is available for inspection and that, on request, such evidence is made available to the City Council.
4. Confirm that the committee understands the forum's liabilities for any claims for damages against it and that it has taken out any necessary insurance to cover such liabilities, for example, public liability insurance.

Spending Neighbourhood Forum Support Grant

The grant must be spent as detailed in the Neighbourhood Forum Support Grant Application Form.

Receipts and invoices should be kept for all expenditure. This evidence of expenditure will be needed by the independent person who examines the forum's accounts at the end of your financial year. You will need to be able to show evidence of expenditure, if requested, when you claim your next Neighbourhood Forum Grant from Birmingham City Council.

A minimum of 75% of the grant awarded must be spent within the neighbourhood forum financial year (subject to the note below).

NOTE: There may be occasions when forums' are not able to spend 75% of the grant, for instance if they have managed to secure free room hire so did not have to pay for these costs. Funds can be spent on other activities promoting the forum or for the benefit of the community, for instance a community event or distributing information that would be useful to residents. In these circumstances forums' will need to check with their Neighbourhood Forum Link Officer first to confirm if what they want to spend the funds on meet the criteria of the grant.



Chamberlain is the non-profit neighbourhood think/do tank based in Birmingham and committed to helping communities and public agencies work together to make better places to live and work.

www.chamberlainforum.org



www.theneighbourhood.info